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SUBJECT: NATIONAL IRAQI MINORITIES COUNCIL CONFERENCE HOLDS
SECOND ANNUAL CONFERENCE

¶1. (U) On May 27, PolOffs and PolFSN attended the Second Annual National Conference of the Iraqi Minorities Council, held at Baghdad's Rashid Hotel. The conference, attended by about 250 people, opened with remarks by surprise guest Council of Representatives Speaker Mahmoud Mashadani.

Mashadani told the delegates, government officials, community leaders and international representatives present that the measure of true democracy in society is the inclusion of all citizens including minorities. He went on to emphasize his personal commitment to the protection of minority rights and said he would back an Armenian Christian candidate for the position of Deputy Minister of State for National Security. Shia Arab politician Ali Dabbagh also addressed the group calling on minorities to teach the majority politicians about their cultures and the issues affecting them.

¶2. (U) Following Mashadani and Dabbagh's remarks the program reverted to the previously announced program and agenda. Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ashraf Qazi spoke of the UN's commitment to the protection of minority rights and proposed the creation of a minority bill of rights. Qazi's remarks were followed by a presentation by Dr. Hanin Al-Qaddo, CoR member and President of the Iraqi Minorities Council. Qaddo spoke about what it means to be a minority and then talked about the specific obligations a nation has to assist and protect its minority populations. His remarks were followed by discussions led by Council members on political participation, social and cultural challenges, and constitutional issues.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: The conference appeared to be well received by the participants. Its primary value seemed to be less the substance of the discussion than the fact of its occurrence for a second year in a row, as well as the guest appearances of both Sunni and Shia Arab politicians such as Mashadani and Dabbagh.

KHALILZAD